7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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THE ITCHING OF THE EYE

787 826 [177] The itching of the eye is considered as an unlucky omen. Grose, celebrated antiquarian, who collected together so many of the superstitions prevalent in his day, says: "When the right eye itches the party affected will shortly cry."

THE ITCHING OF THE HAND

Among other omens we are told that the itching of the hands signifies that they will shortly receive money.

HOWLING OF DOGS

825 763 A superstitious opinion vulgarly prevails in Malta that the howling of a dog in a neighbourhood is the presage of death to any that are sick in it.

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The howling of the dog is ascribed by some to its keen sense of the odour of approaching dissolution. 825 763.

This superstition which, while not confined to our Island, appears to have been almost as well known in ancient times as at the present day. 825 763 171

Dr. Nathaniel Home, in his "Daemonologie" page 60, says: "If dogs howl in the night near a house where somebody is sick, it is a sign of death."

Capitolinus tells us: that the dogs by their howlings presaged the death of Maximinus.

TINGLING of the EAR

It is a well known superstition among the Maltese that when the ear tingles they usually say that somebody is talking of them. A tingling of the right ear 787 826

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THE ACACIA OR SPONGE-TREE

(Gazzïa)

824 Our ancestors had a strong aversion to introducing or bringing in the acacia or sponge-tree with the other flower-plants in the house.

[763] They believed that if the acacia were brought into the house the head thereof would die within twelve months.

THE NEWT

825 Our superstitiously inclined believe that when one kills a newt and leaves its tail contorting or wagging on the floor, that tail will be cursing the parents of its destroyer!

COAL-DUST AND SOOT

777 529 The throwing of coal-dust or soot instead of lime before a door on New year's day betokens gloom and bad luck.

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NEW YEAR'S SUPERSTITIONS

527 763 264

A superstitious dread still attaches to some one of the family keeping absent at dinner time on New Year's day. He who doesn't dine with his family on New Year's day is expected to die at the end of that same year.

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527 262 787

He who eats hotch-potch soup on New year's day is to gnaw the ham bones all the rest of the year.

Those who eat cabbages on New year's day groan for a whole year.

OIL, SALT AND WINE

777 787

The spilling of oil is considered a very unlucky omen by the Maltese. The spilling of salt or wine, however, betokens good luck.

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PARSLEY

824 = 763 When one plucks a stem of parsley by the roots and plants it again he may expect to lose one of his parents within the year.

THE HEN

825 763 When a hen crows it is at once destroyed as it foretells the death of some member of the family.

THE HAWKMOTH OR SPHINX

825 787 The appearance of a white hawkmoth betokens the coming home of some one who is abroad. The appearance of a black hawkmoth, however, is a harbinger of sad news.

COMETS

821 787 The appearance of a comet is a sign of an approaching evil.

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THROWING STONES IN A WELL

Our ancestors made children believe that if they threw stones in a well or into the sea they had to lift them up some day with their eyelashes.

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823

THIRTEEN AT TABLE

Sitting down thirteen to dinner is considered very unlucky.

777
264
763

The notion is that one of the thirteen will die within the next twenty four hours. The origin popularly assigned to this widespread superstition is the fact that thirteen was the number at the Last Supper, Judas being the thirteenth.

SNEEZING

The custom of saying "Evviva" or "Sahha" to one who happens to sneeze

827

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taught to wave, while the band plays the national anthem, 796
'God Save the King.' In the time of the Order they proceeded to the palace to receive permission for the celebration of the Carnival. Their request was signified to the Grand Master by one of the knights, and upon the boon being granted, they immediately performed a dance in front of the palace, and afterwards before the door of any other person, whom they thought would pay them for their trouble.

The origin of this amusement must be sought for in 796
the annals of pagan rites, which Christianity has not 171
succeeded in abolishing in several countries of Europe. In a work on Malta, *Par un voyageur François*, the author ranks it with a popular feast very ancient in Thessaly, the *Salzea* of the Babylonians, the *Chronia* of the Athenians, and the *Saturnalia* of Rome, which many of the early Christians continued, notwithstanding the zealous efforts which were made by the Church to abolish them."

It will be noted that the public "masque" was regarded 796
as "an absurd and foolish diversion." The "diversion" must 656
at some time have proved rather more dangerous than absurd, for the wearing of masks after sunset is now forbidden by law. It is of interest also to note that an attempt on the part [669]
of a strict Sabbatarian Governor who hailed from north of the Tweed to abolish the merrymaking on the Sunday of Carnival led to a major civil disturbance which could only be quelled at bayonet point, and which is still remembered by those who are, for one cause or another, "agin' the Government!"

DYING

Zeppu's tired hands are at rest. They lie, brown and calloused, 763
upon the coverlet. The village bell tolls urgently. The *fratelli*

763 the fratelli
794 —lay brethren of the congregation—hurry from their homes to take their places in the procession of the Viatecum. Marching rapidly, like a company of soldiers, headed by a peasant ringing a staccato, commanding bell, some bearing tapers, some censers, all chanting the prayers for the dying, they pass [793] quickly through the village street. Under a canopy, borne by two sturdy *fratelli*, goes the priest in his bright vestments, bearing God to the dying man.

The women hurry to place a light in their windows, kneel and pray as God passes.

So, with such poor pomp as these simple folk can muster, 764 the Prince of Peace comes to dying Zeppu. The funeral rites [171] and customs differ hardly at all nowadays from those of other Catholic countries. But Zeppu's grandfather could remember a time when the Old Things were much in evidence.

764 There were the "Wailing Women" (whose name *neuuieha* 767 survives in the sense of "one who constantly complains"). They wore long black robes, and chanted death-songs whose burden was a combination of praise for the deceased's virtues and rebuke for his having left them. They cut the vines from the courtyard, overturned the furniture, broke pottery, and mixed the fragments with soot and ashes, staining the doors [302] of the bereaved house with the mixture. They cut pieces of their hair and scattered them over the coffin.

765 If the dead man possessed horses, cows, goats, all their tails [262] had pieces cut from them in token of mourning. There was a [764] form of "wake" where funeral cakes and boiled wheat were eaten. A carpet was spread over the tomb to prevent the unware from treading on it.

[372] No fire was lit in the house for three days after the funeral. [302] The women kept to the house for forty days. The men, having remained indoors for seven days, went unshaven.

764 Here are clear signs of the most primitive funeral rites 174 and *taboos*. Death was a pollution—hence the segregation of